Evelyn: What is the difference between bad Medicine Men and good Medicine Men?

Edith: Well, they claim that the bad Medicine Men, they call them the witch doctors, and they can put a, like a curse on you, as the white man would call it. And you would go through a lot, a lot of bad things, a lot of bad experiences. There are different kinds of birds. Now myself, the day before I left to go to the hospital, I said to my son, "There's eagles up on that roof." "There's no eagles in Toronto," he said to me. "Mother, those are pigeons." But I could see the big hands. But maybe that was all in my imagination, I don't know, but I have been taught that those, they're not eagles, they're hawks, with the big hands, that's a bad bird. And there are a lot of bad things that, like snakes. You encounter the snakes. That's a bad thing, too. But then there are what they now call the high priest, that's the, that is the good doctor. That's who they call the high priest, now. There are supposed to be no more witch doctors. But what they do is they practise witchcraft. And I have heard a lot of witchcraft, like bats
and those kinds of things are bad. I don't know what they do but I kind of think they make you go into nightmares and you have hallucinations. And it's all more or less imaginary. That's my way of thinking. But it's possible it's more than that.

Evelyn: Was there any sort of witch doctors and high priests that existed when you were a child?

Edith: Oh yes. And then they used to see lights. I have seen lights, but my husband explained them to me as bog lights. There's a gas that forms and comes out of the swamps and floats around. But the Indian people thought that was witchcraft.

When you saw this floating around, something was going to happen, real bad, and it usually did. So you don't really know what to believe. It could have been a form of gas, I don't know.

Evelyn: So who told you about this?

Edith: Well, I've seen the light a long, long time ago when I was a child. But when I told my husband about it he said that was probably a bog light, people see them. But I don't think he ever saw them.

Evelyn: Have you ever met a witch doctor?

Edith: I don't know how to answer that. I was telling you about the man that lived right here -- he's supposed to be a witch doctor. Whether he is or not I don't know. I know he came to the hospital to visit me. And he came in with a nice grey suit on and he said he was the doctor. And I was really very sick, and they let him in. I was in the Intensive Care, and how he got in I don't know, but he was there. He just come in and talk to me like, as a friend. He didn't... I really don't know.

Evelyn: Was there any that existed on Curve Lake when you were a child?

Edith: They claimed there was but I never actually encountered any myself. If there was anyone that they claimed that practiced witchcraft, that was a person to stay away from. But I don't really know what to think of that.

Evelyn: Have you ever heard of any stories or anything about them?

Edith: Oh, I've heard all kinds of stories, but none that I can say are really true. Now the owl. I've often wondered what the owl was. They claim that's bad. But yet you see it down there on that tapestry -- they have him in this building, eh. And that's supposed to be God laying there. Now why would the owl be there if it was bad? There's a lot of things that I have to try to look into, to find it out for myself.
Evelyn: When you heard these stories and experiences from people, were they from people or from your parents?

Edith: Well, what we call the witch lights I watched myself. I watched them from young Josh Johnson's house. And they do travel around. Ben used to go out after them with guns, but you can't shoot something with a gun that isn't there, you know what I mean? It was there, the light was there all right. But if it was a bog light, gas, there was nothing you could do by shooting at it. To me I just couldn't figure it out, it just... something scary, you know, in my days. But now if I was to see one I think I would want to go and find out what it was all about.

Evelyn: Have you heard anything from your friends?

Edith: About those things? No.

Evelyn: So when people told you these experiences, was it their own experience, or was it just something that was passed down?

Edith: I think it was something that was passed down. Like my brother-in-law's mother was supposed to be what they called a witch. Nobody would go near her. And strange things went on in her house that they would talk about, you know. Like her house would be all lit up and we had no electricity then. You know, it would only be a lamp light, if there was a light. But instead it would be all lit up. Like now, I try to figure out what the firebug is, nobody knows what the firebug is. I know that when it flies you can see it, but when it lands the fire is out. But you can catch them and you can rub them on you and they smell. They smell musty but then the light stays on if you rub it on your clothing or whatever. And it would stay there for two or three hours, but then it will go away. But those things must be, must run by some kind of, what kind of a system would you call it? It's not battery but they do... Did you ever see one?

Evelyn: Yes.

Edith: They do light up, don't they? Now where did they get their light from? Maybe they all form in a bunch like that and fly around together, and that's what they call the witch light, I don't know. But there is something that does float around, I have seen it. But my husband tries to tell me it's gas, but he's the only one that has ever tried to explain it to me. I used to be scared when I saw those things.

Evelyn: So was there any other sorts of stories you've heard?

Edith: I've heard a lot of stories about the witch doctor, but...

Evelyn: For example.
Edith: Well, like putting a curse on a person and they'd never know what was wrong with that person. That person would just stay in bed and die, you know. They never knew what was wrong with them. But scientifically, I figured, perhaps they died of cancer or something like that. It wouldn't have to necessarily be because of the witch doctor. I mean I tried to think of a different way.

Evelyn: Did you ever hear of them using anything, objects or something?

Edith: Oh yes, they're supposed to get bats and mice, and all sorts of things and make a brew out of things. There was one old man in the reserve, nobody would go near his house, because he was always brewing all kinds of stuff. He could have been making moonshine for all I know. But I mean this is just talk. I mean, I was never there. I was always scared, too. People would say, "Don't go near that house," you know. Well I'd run too, the same as everybody else did.

Evelyn: But no one went to find out who...

Edith: Nobody went to find out. If it was now I would. I'd get real brave and go and ask him what he was doing. Perhaps he was doing that to get rid of people, maybe he didn't want to be bothered. But there are supposed to be real witch doctors.

Evelyn: And them using objects and things.

Edith: Yeah.

Evelyn: Do you know anything else besides brewing a brew?

Edith: No, I guess not.

Evelyn: Do you think they ever get dressed up?

Edith: Dressed up?

Evelyn: In the sense they put certain makeup on their face and...

Edith: No, no I've never seen any of that.

Evelyn: So the way you could distinguish a witch doctor perhaps is by their actions, not by their looks?

Edith: Not by their looks. They look the very same as anyone else.

Evelyn: But people would know on the reserve who it is?

Edith: Oh, Indian people are very superstitious anyways. Like if you done anything odd, right away they would think, you
know, they would be suspicious of you. Like myself, when I was born, because I was born with a veil on my face, they thought I was different. But then they don't even talk about that nowadays. A lot of children could be born with that. Never hear tell of it anymore. But because I was born like that they thought I was somebody special. And being the seventh daughter, of the seventh daughter, I was supposed to be something special. I asked my dad if I was born with a gift. He said, "The gift of the gab, that's all." (laughs) Oh, I got nothing out of him. But still everybody used to tell that there's blood charm, you know, you could stop people from bleeding, or stop a toothache, earache all sorts of, I thought, silly things. My mother never let me even talk about anything like that.

Evelyn: Are they forbidden?

Edith: Well, in my mother's books they were. Not to anyone else. Everyone else is trying to tell me I should try to practice on a few things that I did have. Like I used to get feelings of things that were going to happen, but I didn't really know what was going to happen. And if I told my mother, oh, she'd grab the Bible and have me reading the Bible and praying in no time, because she didn't want me to believe in any of those things.

Evelyn: So your mother was strictly out of the traditional practices of native Indians?

Edith: I guess she was, because her French grandmother was with her nearly all the time.

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